SUBALTERN STUDIES IX
Writings on South Asian History and Society

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SUBALTERN STUDIES IX

Writings on South Asian History and Society

edited by

SHAHID AMIN

and

DIPESH CHAKRABARTY

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Preface

This volume continues some of the past practices of Subaltern Studies. We carry articles embodying new and original research on aspects of subalternity in colonial and contemporary South Asia at the same time as we try to expand our intellectual horizons. Started with a specific agenda bearing on developments within modern South Asian history, Subaltern Studies have now expanded beyond the discipline of history. The essays here retain that original connection with history but also display our engagements with more contemporary problems and theoretical formations.

Some of the papers published here—those by Vivek Dhareshwar and R. Srivatsan, and Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana—were originally presented at the conference on Subalternity and Culture organized jointly at Hyderabad in January 1993 by the Subaltern Studies Collective and the Anveshi Research Centre for Women's Studies. We also include the text of a public lecture by Ranajit Guha also delivered in Hyderabad on 11 January 1993. The five remaining papers—by Ajay Skaria, Gyan Prakash, Kamala Visweswaran and Kancha Illaih—have been independently contributed for this volume. The essay by Kancha Illaih represents a first for Subaltern Studies: it is the first time Subaltern Studies have engaged with contemporary discussions of Dalitbahujan politics in India, and we look forward to more of this in our pages. The essay by David Lloyd in the 'Discussion' section explores parallels, similarities and divergences between subaltern historiography here and that developed in the context of Irish anti-imperialism.

This volume is the result of a collaborative effort on the part of an enlarged Subaltern Studies Collective. As usual two members have undertaken the task of editing the volume on behalf of the Editorial Collective which has been actively involved in determining the overall character and contents of the volume. All correspondence as well as contributions for inclusion in future volumes may be sent to one of the four Executive Editors.

Our thanks go to the Oxford University Press, Delhi for continuing to support this project.

Delhi and Chicago
June 1996

SHAHID AMIN
DIPESH CHAKRABARTY

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1

The Small Voice of History*

RANAJIT GUHA

There are phrases in many languages, Indian as well as others, which speak of historic events and historic deeds. These phrases enjoy the status of common sense and an understanding of their meaning by members of the respective speech communities is presupposed without question. However, the crust of common sense begins to crumble as soon as one asks what precisely the adjective 'historic' is supposed to be doing in such expressions. Its function is of course to assign certain events and deeds to history. But who is it that nominates these for history in the first place? For some discrimination is quite clearly at work here—some unspecified values and unstated criteria—to decide why any particular event or deed should be regarded as historic and not others. Who decides, and according to what values and what criteria? If these questions are pressed far enough, it should be obvious that in most cases the nominating authority is none other than an ideology for which the life of the state is all there is to history. It is this ideology, henceforth to be called statism, which is what authorizes the dominant values of the state to determine the criteria of the historic.

That is why the common sense of history may be said generally to be guided by a sort of statism which thematizes and evaluates the past for it. This is a tradition which goes back to the beginnings of modern historical thinking in the Italian Renaissance. For the ruling elements of the fifteenth-century city-states the study of history served as a schooling in politics and government so indispensable to their role as citizens and

* Text of a public lecture originally delivered in Hyderabad on 11 January 1993.

monarchs. It is entirely appropriate therefore that to Machiavelli, the intellectual most representative of those elements, 'historical study and the study of statecraft should have been essentially the same'.[1]

The ascendancy of the bourgeoisie in Europe during the next three hundred years did little to weaken this bonding of statism and historiography. On the contrary, it was reinforced both by absolutism and republicanism, so that by the nineteenth century, as every schoolboy knows thanks to Lord Acton, politics had become the very staple of historical scholarship. What is no less important is that by then the study of history had become fully institutionalized in Western Europe, perhaps more so in England than elsewhere because of the relatively greater maturity of the English bourgeoisie.

Institutionalization under these conditions meant, first, that the study of history developed into a sort of 'normal science' in the Kuhnian sense. It was integrated into the academic system as a fully secularized body of knowledge with its own curricula and classrooms as well as a profession devoted entirely to its propagation by teaching and writing. Secondly, it now acquired a place of its own in the increasingly expanding public space where the hegemonic process often appealed to history in order to realize itself in the interaction between citizens and the state. It was here, again, that the study of history found its public—a reading public, progeny of the printing technology and avid consumers of such of its products as catered to a new bourgeois taste for historical literature of all kinds. Thirdly, it was this literature ranging from school manuals to historical novels which helped to institutionalize the writing of history by constituting it into imaginative and discursive genres equipped with their distinctive canons and narratologies. The institutionalization of the study of history had the effect, on the whole, of securing a stable base for statism within the academic disciplines and promoting hegemony.

So it was as a highly institutionalized and statist knowledge that the study of history was introduced by the British in nineteenth-century India. However, in a colonial condition neither institutionalization nor statism could be what it was in metropolitan Britain. The relationship of dominance and subordination made for some critical difference here in both respects. Education, the principal instrument used by the Raj to 'normalize' the study of history in India, was limited to a very small minority of the population, and correspondingly, the reading public too was small in size, as was the output of books and periodicals.

[1] Lauro Martines, *Power and Imagination: City-states in Renaissance Italy* (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1983), pp. 268–9.

Institutionalization was therefore of little help to the rulers in their bid for hegemony. It was, on the contrary, simply a measure of the containment of this knowledge within the colonized élite who were the first to benefit from Western education in our subcontinent.

Statism in Indian historiography was a gift of this education. The intelligentsia, its purveyors within the academic field and beyond, had been schooled in their understanding of the history of the world and especially of modern Europe as a history of state systems. In their own work within the liberal professions therefore they found it easy to conform to the official interpretation of contemporary Indian history simply as a history of the colonial state. But there was a fallacy about this interpretation. The consent which empowered the bourgeoisie to speak for all citizens in the hegemonic states of Europe was also the licence used by the latter to assimilate the respective civil societies to themselves. But no such assimilation was feasible under colonial conditions where an alien power ruled over a state without citizens, where the right of conquest rather than the consent of its subjects constituted its charter, and where, therefore, dominance would never gain the hegemony it coveted so much. So it made no sense to equate the colonial state with India as constituted by its own civil society. The history of the latter would always exceed that of the Raj, and consequently an Indian historiography of India would have little use for statism.

The inadequacy of statism for a truly Indian historiography follows from its tendency to forbid any interlocution between us and our past. It speaks to us in the commanding voice of the state which by presuming to nominate the historic for us leaves us with no choice about our own relation to the past. Yet the narratives which constitute the discourse of history are dependent precisely on such choice. To choose means, in this context, to try and relate to the past by listening to and conversing with the myriad voices in civil society. These are small voices which are drowned in the noise of statist commands. That is why we don't hear them. That is also why it is upto us to make that extra effort, develop the special skills and above all cultivate the disposition to hear these voices and interact with them. For they have many stories to tell—stories which for their complexity are unequalled by statist discourse and indeed opposed to its abstract and oversimplifying modes.

Let us consider four such stories.[2] Our source for them is a series of

[2] Panchanan Mandal (ed.), *Chitthipatre Samajchitra, vol. 2* (Viswabharati, Calcutta & Santiniketan, 1953), no. 249 (pp. 181–2), no. 255 (p. 185), no. 257 (pp. 185–6), no. 258 (p. 186).

petitions addressed to the local communities of Brahman priests in some West Bengal villages asking for absolution from the sin of affliction. The sin, supposed to have been testified by the disease itself, called, in each case, for such purificatory rituals as only the Brahmans could prescribe and perform. The offence, no less spiritual than pathological, was identified either by name or symptom or a combination of both. There were two cases of leprosy and one each of asthma and tuberculosis—all diagnosed apparently without the help of specialist advice which, in those days during the first half of the nineteenth century, was perhaps not easily available for the rural poor.

The afflicted were all agriculturists by caste, so far as one can tell by the surnames. For at least one of them occupation was indexed by illness as he traced the ravages of leprosy on his hand to being bitten by a mouse while at work on his paddy field. Nothing could be more secular, indeed down-to-earth, if not quite convincing as an explanation of the disease, and yet the victim himself looked upon the latter as a suffering caused by some unspecified spiritual offence. What is it, one wonders, that made it necessary for a malady of the body to be understood as a malfunction of the soul? For an answer, it must be recognized in the first place that a question such as this could hardly be asked in rural Bengal at the time. With all that had happened geopolitically by then to consolidate British paramountcy, its organ the colonial state was still rather limited in its penetration of Indian society even in that region where the process of colonization had gone the farthest. Insofar as that penetration was a measure of the hegemonic claims of the Raj, the latter were, on this evidence, unrealized in some important respects.

The first of these claims relate to questions of health and medicine. The colonial rulers are said to have won the minds of the natives everywhere by helping them to improve their bodies. This is a commonplace of imperialist discourse meant to elevate European expansion to the level of a global altruism. The control of disease by medicine and the sustenance of health by hygiene were, according to it, the two great achievements of a moral campaign initiated by the colonizers entirely for the benefit of the colonized. But morality was also a measure of the benefactor's superiority, and these achievements were flaunted as the triumph of science and culture. It was a triumph of Western civilization symbolized for the simple-minded peoples of Asia, Africa and Australasia touchingly by soap.

The soap and the Bible were the twin engines of Europe's cultural conquest. For historical reasons specific to the Raj the soap prevailed over

the Bible in our subcontinent, and medicine and public health figured more and more prominently on the record of England's Work in India during the last decades of the nineteenth century. That was a record in which the statement of good deeds served as an announcement of hegemonic intentions as well. Its aim, amongst other things, was to make foreign rule tolerable for the subject population, and science had a part to play in that strategy. Science—the science of war and the science of exploration—had won for Europe its first overseas empires in the mercantile era. Now in the nineteenth century it was for science again to establish a second-order empire by subjugating the bodies of the colonized to the disciplines of medicine and hygiene.

The small voices of the sick in rural India speak of a degree of resistance to that imperial design. They demonstrate how difficult it still was for medicine to rely on that objectification of the body so essential for its success in diagnosis and healing. Although it had already been institutionalized during this period by a medical college and a number of hospitals set up in Calcutta, the clinical gaze had not beamed on to the neighbouring districts yet. Symptomatology would continue to inform pathology there for some time to come and no secular understanding of disease, however necessary, would suffice unless backed by transcendental explanation.

The latter is where science met tradition in a cultural contest. Its outcome was to remain undecided so long as the afflicted turned for help to the law of faith rather than the law of reason in the conviction that the body was merely a register for the gods to inscribe their verdicts against sinners. What our petitioners sought therefore was moral prescriptions for absolution rather than medical ones for cure, and the authority they turned to was not doctors but priests. They were persuaded to do so no less by their individual judgment than by the counsel of their respective communities. The petitions were all witnessed by signatories from the same or neighbouring villages, and in three out of four by those from the same caste. In fact, the petitioners were not necessarily the diseased themselves, but a kinsman in one instance and a number of fellow villagers in another.[3] Absolution was for them as important as cure. Hence the sense of urgency about ritual expiation (*prayaschitta*). The latter was doubly efficacious. Its function was to absolve not only a particular offender from the polluting effect of his sin, but also others who had incurred

[3] The five petitioners in the case of tuberculosis are all from the sick man's own village Singarpur (op. cit., no. 255), while the petitioner in the other case describes the patient as his mother-in-law (ibid., no. 257).

impurity by association (*samsarga*). Since certain kinds of diseases, such as leprosy, were thought to be highly polluting, the need for ritual purification was always a communal concern.

That concern has much to tell us about the history of power. At one level, it is evidence of the limitations of colonialism—that is, of the resistance its science, its medicine, its civilizing institutions and administrative policies, in short, its reason encountered in rural India even as late as the 1850s. That is a level quite accessible to statist discourse: it is never happier than when its globalizing and unifying tendency is allowed to deal with the question of power in gross terms. It is a level of abstraction where all the many stories these petitions have to tell are assimilated to the story of the Raj. The effect of such lumping is to oversimplify the contradictions of power by reducing them to an arbitrary singularity—the so-called principal contradiction, that between the colonizer and the colonized.

But what about the contradiction between priest and peasant in rural society, the contradiction between those dispensers of *shastric* injunction for whom to touch a plough is *adharma* and their victims for whom the labour on the rice fields is dharma itself, the contradiction between a caste association (*samaj*) led more often than not by its élite and the sick amongst its members handed over to sacerdotal authority as a gesture of willing subordination to Brahmanism and landlordism? When Abhoy Mandal of Momrejpur, considered polluted by the asthmatic attacks suffered by his mother-in-law, submits himself for expiation to the local council of priests and says, 'I am utterly destitute; would the revered gentlemen be kind enough to issue a prescription that is commensurate to my misery?'[4] or when Panchanan Manna of Chhotobainan, his body racked by anal cancer, pleads before a similar authority in his own village, 'I am very poor; I shall submit myself to the purificatory rites of course; please prescribe something suitable for a pauper,'[5]—are we to allow these plaintive voices to be drowned in the din of a statist historiography? What kind of history of our people would that make, were it to turn a deaf ear to these histories which constitute, for that period, the density of power relations in a civil society where the colonizer's authority was still far from established?

Yet who amongst us as historians of India can claim not to have been compromised by élitism of this particular kind—namely, statism? It pervades so obviously the work of scholars who follow the colonialist model that I would rather not take your time over it: in any case, I have

[4] Ibid., no. 257.
[5] Ibid., no. 258.

already discussed that question elsewhere at some length.[6] All that need be said here is simply that the statist point of view which informs the colonialist model is identical with the colonizer's own standpoint: the state it refers to is none other than the Raj itself. However there is a statism which prevails in nationalist and Marxist discourses as well. The referent in both of these is a state that differs in a significant respect from that in colonialist writing. The difference is one between power realized in a well-formed and well-established regime of many years' standing and power that is yet to actualize; a dream of power. It is a dream that anticipates a nation–state with emphasis laid primarily on self-determination defined in liberal–nationalist writing by only the most general liberal–democratic terms, and in left-nationalist and Marxist writing by state–socialist terms. In either case historiography is dominated by the hypothesis of a principal contradiction which once resolved would convert the vision of power into its substance. Between the two it is the latter that is considerably more complex in its articulation of statism and I shall concentrate on it for the rest of my talk if only because its intellectual challenge for any critique is more sophisticated, hence more formidable, than that of nationalist discourse.

It is well known how for many academics and activists concerned with the problem of social change in the subcontinent the historical experience of peasant insurgency has been the paradigmatic instance of an anticipation of power. And that instance has nowhere been more fully documented than in P. Sundarayya's monumental history of the Telangana uprising.[7] This was an uprising of the mass of peasants and agricultural labourers in the south-eastern region of the Indian peninsula called Telangana, now a part of Andhra Pradesh. The uprising, led by the Communist Party, assumed the form of an armed struggle directed first against the princely state of the Nizam of Hyderabad and then against the Government of India when the latter annexed the kingdom to the newly founded republic. The rebellion ran its course from 1946 to 1951 and won some important victories for the rural poor before being put down by the Indian army. An authoritative account of the event was published twenty years later by P. Sundarayya, the principal leader of the insurrection, in his book *Telangana People's Struggle and Its Lessons.*

The unifying element in Sundarayya's account is power—a vision of

[6] In 'Dominance without Hegemony and its Historiography': *Subaltern Studies VI* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1989), pp. 210–309.

[7] P. Sundarayya, *Telangana People's Struggle and Its Lessons* (Communist Party of India–Marxist, Calcutta, 1972).

power in which the fight for land and fair wages was significantly overdetermined by certain administrative, judicial and military functions. These, properly speaking, are state-like functions, but were reduced in this instance to the level of local authority because of the character and scope of the struggle. Yet the latter with all its limitations was oriented towards a contest for state power as acknowledged by its adversaries—the landlord state of the Nizam and the bourgeois state of Independent India. The organs of its authority and the nature of the programmes envisaged for the areas under its control also testified to such an orientation. Power, anticipated thus, was to be won in the form of an embryonic state by the resolution of that 'principal contradiction' which, apparently, was not quite the same under the Nizam's rule as under Nehru's. Whatever that was—and Party theoreticians were locked in an interminable wrangle over the issue—its resolution in a manner favourable to the people could be achieved, according to them, only by means of armed resistance. It followed, therefore, that the values most appreciated in this struggle—values such as heroism, sacrifice, martyrdom, etc.—were those that informed such resistance. In a history written to uphold the exemplary character of that struggle one would expect those values and the corresponding deeds and sentiments to dominate.

All these three aspects of the Telangana movement—that is, an anticipation of state power, strategies and programmes designed for its realization, and the corresponding values—are neatly integrated in Sundarayya's narrative. It is significant, however, that the condition for such coherence is a singularity of purpose which has been presupposed in his account of the struggle and which provides it with its discursive unity and focus. What would happen to coherence and focus if one were to question that singularity and ask whether that single struggle was all that gave the Telangana movement its content?

This disturbing question has indeed been asked. It has been asked by some of the women who had themselves been active in the uprising. Heard first in a series of interviews it has been recorded as material for a feminist reading of that history by other women of a younger generation. Two amongst the latter, Vasantha Kannabiran and K. Lalita have illuminated for us some of the implications of this question in their essay 'That Magic Time'.[8] The question, they say, has something common to all its variations as it occurs in the interviews: it is 'an undertone of

[8] Vasantha Kannabiran and K. Lalit[h]a, 'That Magic Time' in Kumkum Sangari and Suresh Vaid (eds), *Recasting Women* (Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1990), pp. 190–223.

harassment' and 'a note of pain' which the voices of the older women carry for the younger ones to hear.[9] 'Hearing', we know, 'is constitutive for discourse'.[10] To listen is already to be open to and existentially disposed towards: one inclines a little on one side in order to listen. That is why speaking and listening between generations of women are a condition of solidarity which serves, in its turn, as the ground for a critique. While solidarity corresponds to listening and inclining towards, Kannabiran and Lalita's critique addresses some of the problems arising from the privative modes of not-listening, turning a deaf ear to, turning away from. The small voice speaking in a certain undertone, as if in pain, is pitted, in this instance, against the privative mode of statist discourse, a commanding noise characteristically male in its 'inability to *hear* what the women were saying'.[11]

What was it that the women were saying in undertones of harassment and pain? They spoke, of course, of their disappointment that the movement had not lived fully upto its aim of improving the material conditions of life by making land and fair wages available for the working people of Telangana. That was a disappointment they shared with men. But the disappointment specific to them as women resulted from the leadership's failure to honour the perspective of women's liberation it had inscribed in the ideology and programme of the struggle. It was that perspective which had mobilized them *en masse*. They saw in it the promise of emancipation from an ancient thraldom which with all the diversity of its instruments and codes of subjugation was unified by a singular exercise of authority—that is, male dominance. Such dominance was, of course, parametric to Indian parliamentary politics. That it would be so for the politics of insurrection as well was what Telangana women were soon to find out from their experience as participants.

It is not difficult, therefore, to understand why the strength women added to the movement by their numbers, enthusiasm, and hope should have generated some tension within it. It was not a tension that could be solved without altering in some fundamental sense the perspective of the struggle as worked out by its leaders. Women's emancipation was for them simply a sum of equal rights—an end to be achieved by reformist measures. Emancipation by reform had indeed attracted women initially to the movement. However, as they surged forward to participate actively in it, the very impetuosity of that surge with all its buffeting, wrenching

[9] Ibid., pp. 194, 196.

[10] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1987), p. 206.

[11] Kannabiran and Lalit[h]a, p. 199.

and overflowing made it impossible for the notion of emancipation to keep standing where the leadership had put it. The turbulence turned out to be the mould for a new concept of emancipation. It no longer sufficed to think it as a package of benefits conferred on women by the design and initiative of men. Henceforth, the idea of equal rights would tend to go beyond legalism to demand nothing less than the self-determination of women as its content. Emancipation would be a process rather than an end and women its agency rather than its beneficiaries.

There is no recognition at all in Sundarayya's work of women's agency either as a concept or as a matter of fact. Consider the following passage which sets the tone for his approach to this important theme in a chapter concerned entirely with women's role in the Telangana Movement. He speaks with genuine admiration about 'that tremendous revolutionary spirit and energy that is smouldering in our economically and socially oppressed womenfolk' and goes on to observe in the next sentence:

> If *we* only take a little trouble *to enable* it to emerge out of its *old tradition-bound shell* and try *to channel* it in *the proper revolutionary direction*, what a mighty upheaval it will lead to.[12]

The first person plural speaks here obviously for a predominantly male leadership unaware of or indifferent to the fact that it is itself trapped in an 'old tradition-bound shell' in its attitude to women. Yet it invests itself in the triple role of the stronger condescending 'to enable' those presumed to be the weaker, the enlightened undertaking to liberate those still imprisoned by tradition, and of course the avant-garde ready 'to channel' the energies of a backward and gendered mass towards the 'proper revolutionary direction'. The élitism of this stance can hardly be overstated.

It is no wonder, therefore, that the programmatic gestures made towards emancipation were not allowed by the leadership to shift out of the groove of reform, and the authorized view of women's participation remained one of sheer instrumentality. Consequently, when the crunch came at any point of the movement and a decision had to be taken to resolve some problem or other of male dominance in a manner likely to undermine it, the solution was deferred, avoided, or simply ruled out within the party in the name of organizational discipline—a question about which Kannabiran and Lalita have much to say—and within the community at large in the name of respect for 'mass opinion'.[13] The

[12] Sundarayya, pp. 328–9. Emphasis added.

[13] 'No decision was to be given which would put mass opinion against us.' Thus Sundarayya on questions of marriage and sexuality. Ibid., p. 351.

tribune in either case was patriarchy. 'Mass opinion' was its alibi to harness expediency to its own authority, and organizational discipline its pretext to deal with questions of sexuality by a code that denounced questioning itself as subversive.

The writing of history, I regret to say, conforms fully to patriarchy in Sundarayya's narrative. The principles of selection and evaluation common to all historiography are in agreement here with a pre-fabricated statist perspective in which a hierarchized view of contradiction upholds a hierarchized view of gender relations with no acknowledgement at all of women's agency in the movement. With all its goodwill towards women and praise showered lavishly on their courage, sacrifice, ingenuity, etc. that writing remains deaf to 'what the women were saying'.

But suppose there were a historiography that regarded 'what the women were saying' as integral to its project, what kind of history would it write? The question is, for me, so complex and far-reaching that I can do no more than make some general observations at this stage. At this stage, because our critique of statist discourse cannot by itself produce an alternative historiography. For that to happen the critique must move beyond conceptualization into the next stage—that is, the practice of re-writing that history.

A re-writing of the history of the Telangana movement that is attentive to the 'undertones of harassment' and the 'note of pain' in women's voices will, in the first place, challenge the univocity of statist discourse. One of the most important consequences of the ensuing contest will be to destroy the hierarchization which privileges one particular set of contradictions as principal or dominant or central and regards the need for its solution as prior to or more urgent than that for all the others.

Secondly, a re-writing that heeds the small voice of history will put the question of agency and instrumentality back into the narrative. The latter, in its authorized version, has no room for it. The story of the insurrection is told with its agency invested exclusively in the party, the leadership, and the male, while the other active elements are all relegated to a state of instrumentality subject to no change under the impact of the developing movement. In a new historical account this metaphysical view will clash with the idea that women were agents rather than instruments of the movement which was itself constituted by their participation. This will inevitably destroy the image of women as passive beneficiaries of a struggle for 'equal rights' waged by others on their behalf. The concept of 'equal rights' will, in its turn, lose its legalistic connotation and recover its dignity as an essential aspect of the self-emancipation of women.

Thirdly, I feel that women's voice, once it is heard, will activate and make audible the other small voices as well. Those of the adivasis—the aboriginal populations of the region—for instance. They too have been marginalized and instrumentalized in the statist discourse. Here again, as in the case of women, the garland of praise for their courage and sacrifice is no compensation for the lack of an acknowledgement of their agency. What I have in mind here is not simply a revision on empirical grounds alone. I want historiography to push the logic of its revision to a point where the very idea of instrumentality, the last refuge of élitism, will be interrogated and re-assessed not only with regard to women but all participants.

Finally, a narratological point. If the small voice of history gets a hearing at all in some revised account of the Telangana struggle, it will do so only by interrupting the telling in the dominant version, breaking up its storyline and making a mess of its plot. For the authority of that version inheres in the structure of the narrative itself—a structure informed in post-Enlightenment historiography, as in the novel, by a certain order of coherence and linearity. It is that order which dictates what should be included in the story and what left out, how the plot should develop in a manner consistent with its eventual outcome, and how the diversities of character and event should be controlled according to the logic of the main action.

Insofar as the univocity of statist discourse relies on such an order, a certain disorderliness—a radical deviation from the model that has dominated the writing of history for the last three hundred years—will be an essential requirement for our revision. What precise form such disorder may assume is hard to predict. Perhaps it will force the narrative to stutter in its articulation in stead of delivering in an even flow of words; perhaps the linearity of its progress will dissolve in loops and tangles; perhaps chronology itself, the sacred cow of historiography, will be sacrificed at the altar of a capricious, quasi-Puranic time which is not ashamed of its cyclicity. All one can say at this point is that the overthrow of the regime of bourgeois narratology will be the condition of that new historiography sensitized to the undertones of despair and determination in woman's voice, the voice of a defiant subalternity committed to writing its own history.